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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000719

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (PFEUFFER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: EARLY ELECTIONS NIPPED IN THE BUD?

REF: A. PFEUFFER-NAVRATIL EMAIL DTD 9/1/07

1B. SKOPJE 709

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(b) & (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The prospect of early elections in Macedonia probably has receded following a joint U.S.-EU demarche September 4 to relay points to Prime Minister Gruevski's cabinet on the potential risks to the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations of such action. However, the early elections option could re-emerge in the event Gruevski surrenders to the temptation of an easy electoral victory if his approval ratings continue to rise, opposition obstructionism continues, and his coalition allies burden him with what he considers excessive demands. End summary.

HIGHLIGHTING POTENTIAL RISKS OF EARLY ELECTIONS

12. (C) The Charge, accompanied by P/E Chief and EUSR POLAD Walsh, drew upon ref A points on early elections to PM Gruevski's Chief of Staff, Martin Protogjer, and to Gruevski's foreign policy adviser, Andre Lepavcov, on September 4. The Charge underscored that, although it was the GOM's decision whether to proceed to early elections as the MFA's State Secretary had recently outlined to us (ref B), seriously flawed elections would color views in Brussels and Washington regarding the strength of the country's democratic institutions. Furthermore, they would distract the government from reform efforts that could call into question the country's readiness for NATO membership. That, in turn, could undermine investor confidence, both foreign and domestic.

13. (C) The Charge also emphasized that flawed elections and disruptive post-election coalition building efforts would be viewed with concern as potentially destabilizing just when the Kosovo status process was entering a critical phase. EUSR POLAD Walsh told Protogjer that the EU fully shared the USG perspective. She added that a flawed electoral process could further delay the EU's decision to define a date for beginning accession negotiations with Skopje.

IMPROVING PARLIAMENTARY EFFICIENCY AND COALITION RELATIONS
THROUGH EARLY ELECTIONS

¶4. (C) Protogjer said he shared U.S. and EU concerns about the timing of early elections, especially in relation to Kosovo status developments. However, he said, the government was being "pushed into" an early elections scenario by an inefficient parliament characterized by constant opposition moves to block the passage of reform legislation. The opposition was intent on destroying the ruling party's chances of earning of a NATO membership invitation in 2008 and wanted to block current GOM attempts to combat crime and corruption.

¶5. (C) Early elections, given the Prime Minister's and VMRO-DPMNE ruling party's high poll ratings, would change the political dynamics in the parliament and allow the government to sidestep opposition obstructionism, said Protogjer. In the event a new coalition government was formed after the elections (implying a VMRO alliance with ethnic opposition DUI), intra-coalition relations ostensibly would improve. Nevertheless, he said the early elections idea was only being "discussed informally" within VMRO's executive board at this time.

¶6. (C) Responding to Protogjer's comments, the Charge noted that a hallmark of democracy is the ability to work with the opposition to reach compromises on important issues, such as the various political and judicial reform measures Macedonia is pursuing in connection with its Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. EUSR's Walsh added that, in terms of Macedonia's EU aspirations, the government had to demonstrate it could reach a consensus with the opposition on passing certain key reform laws.

EARLY ELECTIONS NOT ON THE TABLE?

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¶7. (C) Foreign policy adviser Lepavcov, in a separate meeting, noted that Gruevski recently had stated publicly that he "was not thinking about (early elections) at the moment." That position could change, however, if Gruevski's coalition partners DPA and NSDP increased pressure on the coalition with increasing demands, in which case the early elections option would be put back on the table. (NOTE: Opposition DUI in principle opposes early elections, since it believes Gruevski's junior coalition partner DPA would manipulate them in order to ensure DPA's survival in the coalition. Nevertheless, DUI VP Arifi recently told us the party would not rule out a coalition with Gruevski in the future, but that such an arrangement would require careful and extended preparatory work between the two parties. END NOTE.)

¶8. (C) Later the same day, Protogjer contacted us to report that he had briefed PM Gruevski on our conversation and that Gruevski had decided the government would not call early elections, "either before or immediately after the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest." Protogjer said the government intended to serve out its full mandate (until 2010) and to then compete in and win elections based on a solid record of accomplishments. He did note that the GOM would ask us (U.S. and EU) for assistance in working with the opposition to get them to stop blocking legislative processes and to play a more constructive role in relations with the GOM.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Although the likelihood of early elections probably has receded for now in the face of the joint U.S.-EU demarche, the temptation of an easy electoral win could prove too great for Gruevski to resist if his poll numbers continue to rise, opposition obstructionism persists, and his coalition partners place what he perceives to be excessive demands on him. Gruevski also wants to keep the lid on early elections discussions in the government, since neither DPA nor NSDP will react positively or constructively if they discover a move afoot to replace them with their DUI rivals.

End comment.
NAVRATIL